



Company invents germ-zapping robot

SAN ANTONIO - A new robot invented by Xenex Disinfection Services resembles R2-D2 of Stars Wars fame and is just as handy: it zaps germs and viruses -- including Ebola.

While the robot is not designed do anything for a person infected with the disease, it can help keep spaces like hospital rooms clean of residual germs that could have been left after a first cleaning.

"The Ebola virus is actually susceptible to ultraviolet light. Our system can deactivate Ebola in under two minutes," said Sarah Simmons, Xenex's science director, whose background is in epidemiology and biostatistics.

The robot uses eco-friendly green xenon gas to create ultraviolet light 25,000 times brighter than sunlight. The light is on timed intervals depending on the size of the surface or room and the items inside.

"The light we make actually scrambles the DNA of bacteria," said Simmons.

She described how the germ-zapper works on the DNA.

"DNA is the blood of life for the organisms on earth," she said. "(The light) messes up that book -- puts typos in that book (so) they can't read the instructions anymore and they can't replicate or cause infections."

The robots are currently in 250 hospitals across the country. Xenex is focused on health care facilities but they have developed protocols for airplanes, cruise ships and professional sports teams.

San Antonio Academy had a staph infection spread among a few football players last year so they called in the robot to rid the team of the germs that caused them to be infected.

"We came in and zapped all of their pads, eliminated the staph infection immediately," Simmons said, "and because of that success, they have asked us to come in and do preventative zapping every year."

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